



The Representation of 'the Others' as Strategies of Symbolic Construction

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Pablo R. Cristoffanini

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I. Introduction

A central problem concerning communication between people of different cultures is the representation of the 'others' as different from 'us'. Many of these representations have a long history, in other words, they feed upon figures created in the encounter of Europeans with non-Europeans – indigenous Americans, Asians, Africans – products of the expansion of the European powers, in turn – Spanish, Portuguese, English, French – to other continents. This history also covers the encounter of the Anglo-Saxon Americans with people of other 'races' like the Mexicans in the southwest of the United States.

When we speak of Others different from us' we are not referring exclusively to other 'exotic' people, but rather in general to all those marked by their differences from a racial, sexual, social, national, or ethnic perspective.

Some of the frequently cited works in the field of intercultural communication in Denmark are based on the representation of the Others.¹ Although these representations are subjective constructions, they attempt to make us believe that they deal with the 'reality' about the Others, since the descriptions are endorsed by graphs, statistics, and computational models.² Nevertheless, they deal with ultra-simplifications made from the cultural values of researchers anchored in a specifically northern European culture and without a methodical and critical separation with regard to it. Mexicans, Venezuelans, and Chileans, for example, are represented as people who are distanced in relation to power (authoritarian), as people who have a great tendency to avoid uncertainty (control and hierarchies), as collectivists (not individualistic), and therefore not modern.³ One must ask, collectivists, authoritarians, hierarchical: With respect to whom? Who is the evaluating subject? The main problem with this sort of ultra-simplification, presented otherwise as a scientific one, is that certain groups' characteristics are shown as the true nature of the citizens of the nation.

Representations of the Others that are more or less partial, distorted, selective, ultra-simplified, or deformed persist, at times, in spite of education, travel experiences, or information of individual people. At a collective level, in certain

¹ Here I am thinking about works like Geert Hofstede (1984). *Cultures Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*". Sage, Bever Hills, California and that of Erik Kærgaard Kristensen (1993). *Kulturforskelle og den internationale markedsføring*. Samfundslitteratur.

social and economic circumstances (as those in which we live in today's Europe with rather considerable immigration coming from Arab countries and Africa) sociopsychological scenarios appear in which negative representations of the Others become sharper, returning to the stigmatization of entire groups because of their religious beliefs. Our beliefs and attitudes toward the Others, the images that we emphasize, and the words that we use when we refer to them have consequences and they are an important factor in our communication.

A current of cognitive sociology – to which Scandinavian experts in intercultural communication such as Øyvind Dahl⁴ adhere – affirm that the selectivity and ultra-simplification of the representation of the Others are necessary and inevitable as they are a product of mental mechanisms in the processing of stimuli. This perspective leaves us disarmed before partial, distorted and instrumental representations of the Others. For this reason it is necessary to examine some central suppositions and presuppositions and to confront the cognitive approach with alternative conceptions of this problem, such as those inspired by semiotics, rhetoric and social psychology that realize not only the limitations, but also the possibilities of choice in the representation of the Others. New research in social psychology and rhetoric have seriously questioned the cognitive comprehension of the thought process and the representation and sowing of serious doubts about the inevitability of prejudice and stereotypes from now on in this process. If these *figures of representation* cannot be attributed to a “cognitive iron cage (in the sense that we are talking about psychological mechanisms from which we can't escape) how can we explain the fact that the majority of the representations of the “Others different from Us” might be negatively or positively exaggerated? To answer this question I think that it

² I refer to the work of Hofstede previously cited and the innumerable articles and academic works based on the ideas and beliefs of Hofstede.

³ These simplistic categorizations can be questioned from many angles. I mention only two. The categories depend on the culture of the subject that creates them. Would a studious Frenchman, Mexican, or Chinese consider the Chilean culture as having a great power distance? The Danish culture in the schemata of Hofstede is associated with individualism. But how is it that in an individualistic society one must pay 50% and more of one's salary for the welfare of the society as a whole? A culture can be individualistic and collectivist, depending on the sphere being discussed. For this reason, I see the schemata of Hofstede as an ultrasimplification bordering on stereotypes.

⁴ Øyvind Dahl (1995). “The Use of Stereotypes in Intercultural Communication”. In: “Essays on Culture and Communication (edited by Torben Vestergaard). *Language and Culture Contact 10*. Ålborg University: Ålborg.

is necessary to see the attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, and stereotypes in the broadest context as tied to ideologies. The symbolic constructions permit us to learn, evaluate, or communicate a reality. Often, this occurs as ideo-logical creations and argumentations, in other words, in a partial way, legitimizing dominance, exploitation, and inequality.

These are some of the reasons of the persistence of stereotyping and prejudice. There are others of a psychological nature, such as the fascination we have for exact exotic peoples.

II. Representation and Meaning

Representation is narrowly tied to meaning. In effect, we give sense and meaning to things through usage: that which we say, think, and feel about them. On the other hand, we give meaning to events, people, and objects by means of interpretive maps in which we place ourselves. Therefore, our evaluation of these people, events, and objects may be very different although we may be referring to the same “reality”. Yet, we also give meaning to things, people, and objects through the manner in which we represent them, the feelings that we associate with them, the images that we use, and the stories that we tell.

In order to represent these things, people, and objects we make use of signs, that is to say words, sounds, or images that replace a concept or something in reality, or of something else.

Culture deals precisely with the production and exchange of meanings and that is why we can say that the members of one culture tend to see the world in a similar manner, which does not mean that a culture might necessarily be unitary. We must recall that Nero and Seneca were members of the same culture as were Pinochet and Allende. In fact, in any culture there is more than one meaning concerning people, events, and objects; moreover – and this is important – there is a battle for that significance.⁵ The way in which we categorize the world and the significance we give to things influence our behavior. Therefore, those who are interested in influencing our behavior fight to made their meanings become the dominant ones. Thus, culture is not only a matter of ideas and concepts, but rather also a matter of feelings. Jews under Nazism experienced this after the Nazis were successful in giving a specific significance to the word “Jew”.

Meaning is also tied to identity in the sense that the demarcations made by the culture to which we pertain allow us to distinguish between those who are 'within' and those who are 'outside'. The representations of personal identity and national culture also perform in this sense since we can know what it means to be Danish, Mexican, or Spanish just by the representations that have been made of Danish-ness, Mexican-ness, or Spanish-ness.

As I have indicated, we represent with the help of semiotic systems. They are in place of our concepts, ideas, and feelings. For this reason, at the moment of studying the question of the mimesis or representation of the Other, the semiotics of theory, concepts, and methods constitute a principal discipline.⁶ Another central approximation involves the theories of discourse. I understand discourse as a form of talking about a topic and the images, ideas, and practices associated with it.

III. From stereotypes as necessary and inevitable to stereotypes as ideology and fascination

III.a. Stereotypes and prejudice

The study of representation is not exhausted. Nevertheless, it is the problem that concerns me. The relationship between representations and behavior is neither direct nor simple. Two Danish businessmen, for example, might share a similar representation of Muslims, but one of them, in spite of this, and for reasons of profit, might decide to employ workers of the same ethnic group, while the other, because of strong feelings of aversion that his representation provokes in him, does not do it, in spite of possible losses. On the other hand, there is no doubt that there is a graduation from less to more violence in our behavior toward the Others who are negatively represented. This graduation ranges from speaking badly about someone to (at the other extreme) torture and extermination.

⁵ Think, for example, about the controversy about how to qualify the Chechens that fight against the Russian invasion. Are they terrorists or resistance fighters? Categorization has a series of serious political and legal consequences.

⁶ Examples of the use of semiotics are works like those of Jan Gustafsson and Stuart Hall

Representations are tied to beliefs and attitudes. Because of this, it is reasonable to return our sights to social psychology which, through studies of stereotypes and prejudice, offers us some explanations as to how and why distorted or generalized images of groups and individuals – and the attitudes and behaviors tied to them – persist and resist change.

One of the methods of clarifying the question of negative representations and attitudes is through the cognitive process. This approximation has been based in great measure on the ideas of Gordon W. Allport and are developed in his classic work, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954).

Allport's ideas have as context the recently lived experience of World War II and the subsequent efforts to avoid a similar catastrophe. Researches efforts are focused on how to better human relationships. On one hand, technical and scientific conquests and the dominance over nature were indeed impressive, confirms Allport. But, from the point of view of human relations the situation was quite different. His description of the animosity between Muslims and non-Muslims, of the situation of the Jews and the refugees that arrived in inhospitable countries are disturbingly similar to the current situation. The experience of World War II and the tragedy of the Jews leads him to search for the roots of prejudice, which are seen as an obstacle to human relations and an impediment to the development of the abilities affiliated with the human persona. What is prejudice? Allport asks and offers various definitions: "thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant", understanding "thinking ill" as both feelings of rejection and hostile behavior. Allport distinguishes between, on the one hand, prior judgment with a basis and, on the other hand, prejudice. Thus, the negative representation and feelings of rejection of the great majority of the North American population toward the Nazi leadership, according to him, was not prejudice as they had a solid base in the knowledge of the theory and practice of the Nazis approved by these leaders.

Prejudice is also described as a hostile attitude and shunning of a person because he belongs to a group with criticizable characteristics. The "erroneous" and "inflexible" character of the representations contained in prejudice are emphasized in all of these definitions. The definition of prejudice from the Oxford Dictionary comprises a good summary of the different definitions that Allport presents:

“Dislike or distrust of a person, group, custom, etc. that is based on fear or false information rather than on reason or experience, and that influences one’s attitude and behaviour towards them”. (Oxford: 909)

Where does prejudice come from? According to Allport, certain mental characteristics and human nature such as tendencies to generalization, hostility, which, to a lesser extent, causes us to group ourselves with people of our ethnic group. The process of categorization is fundamental to the formation of prejudice and stereotypes; we think with the help of categories and in this process: a) the mind forms groups and classes to guide our daily actions; b) it assimilates as much as possible within each group; c) the categories allow us to quickly identify an object; d) we call the purely intellectual categories concepts, but generally the concepts are added to a feeling. Example: School, I like school; e) categories can be more or less rational, the former are developed based on a nucleus of truth, the latter are not. The fundamental thing in the prejudice-category relationship, from the perspective of the consequences that it has had for these last concepts, is Allport’s idea that categorization carries with it an erroneous simplification:

“Man has a propensity to prejudice. This propensity lies in his normal and natural tendency to form generalizations, concepts, categories, whose content represents an oversimplification of his world of experience.”⁷

Allport’s conception about stereotypes was ambivalent. Influenced by Adorno, he distinguished from the outset between category and stereotypes: *“A stereotype is not identical with a category; it is rather a fixed idea that accompanies the category”*. Thus, for example, *black* is the category, and stereotypes are the images that add a bias to the category: musical, good runners, sexually well-endowed, rhythmic, etc.

However, he later underlined the idea that categorization implied generalization and distortion and that this was the basis of prejudice and stereotypes. This last idea impregnated all cognitive psychology that has seen categorization as a cardinal cognitive process that allows us to structure and give coherence to our knowledge of reality and to the social world. In this approximation, from a biologist perspective, categorization implies distortion and simplification. As other living creatures, human beings organize the world from stimuli through various perspectives – edible/inedible, dangerous/not dangerous, etc.

This rationale arrives at the conclusion about the need for stereotypes. Effectively, if categorization is a function of thought and if all categorization implies generalization, the stereotype is an inevitable derivation of the same function of thought.

A Scandinavian expert in intercultural communication arrives at conclusions similar to these in his '*The Uses of Stereotypes in Intercultural Communication*'. In this article Dahl affirms that the predictions that we make about the Others (foreigners) will inexorably be based on stereotypes and that this is a necessary and inevitable process. Furthermore,

*"We must recognize that we cannot communicate with people from our own or another culture (or talk about them) without stereotypes"*⁸

The same concept of the stereotype, based on suppositions as to how thought functions, runs the risk of converting itself into a legitimization of them. Not only this, but also the study of stereotypes and the representations of the Others loses interest and leaves us impotent before racism, xenophobia, and sexual discrimination. So in effect, if stereotypes are an inevitable product of universal cognitive mechanisms and therefore necessary and inevitable, they have no importance other than that of being an illustration of how cognition functions and, even worse, they are unable to change, or to be questioned or counteracted. Nevertheless, we know that the representations of the Others are modified (that of Jews, blacks, Arabs, women, homosexuals, Russians) to a different degree from society to society, at distinct rhythms, but they do change. Stereotypes not only change, but at times certain representations of them disappear, a product of historical context and they are politically specific (i.e. that of European Jews post WWII) to become newly discerned: today's European Jews.

In addition, this manner of understanding stereotypes is rather boring if we do not consider – in light of the supposed universal character of cognitive mechanisms – the historical and cultural contexts that give form and contribute to the development of stereotypes.

⁷ Gordon W. Allport (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*, p. 27. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company: Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁸ Dahl Øyvind (1995). "The Use of Stereotypes in Intercultural Communication", p. 17.

The criticisms of the concepts that see prejudice and stereotypes as derivative of a so-called *iron cage* built by universal laws of cognition have made the social, historical, and collective sides of the figures of representation of the Others visible.

From the outset, the existence of an essential difference between the processing of stimuli of living beings on the one hand and human beings on the other can be affirmed. The peculiarity of human beings resides precisely in the fact that their access to the world is made through gigantic symbolic or semiotic systems, depending on how one understands the concepts of symbol and sign.⁹ The categorizations of human beings are made principally through a key semiotic system: language. Language allows us to represent people, groups, and happenings in simplified or enriched forms, in a prejudiced or tolerant manner. Language can be used to group details and to generalize or to particularize and argue special cases.

For these reasons, authors such as Michael Billig have suggested that, in place of considering the same process of thought starting with the bureaucratic model (which uses categorization to make things malleable and predictable) it is much more appropriate to see this process from the perspective of rhetorical metaphor, in other words, the person can argue, critique, and persuade.

Thus, even racists and fascists often argue their points of view in a complicated manner.¹⁰

The conclusions of authors such as Dahl fall on one side of the equalization of category with stereotype and on the other, the supposed process of thought and communication is made only in relation to these categories. But, as Allport indicated, category and stereotype are not the same. Categories are necessary to understand 'reality', to create order, but they are flexible and they change. It might suffice to just remember which categories are used to recognize social

⁹ Those that have been mentioned, among others, by Cassier, Susanne Langer and Clifford Geertz. Ernst Cassier (1982). *Las ciencias de la cultura*. Fondo de Cultura Económica: México. From the same author (1989) *Esencia y efecto del concepto de símbolo*. Fondo de Cultura Económica: México. Susanne K. Langer (1969). *Menneske og symbol*. Gyldendals Uglebøger: Haslev. Clifford Geertz (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. BasicBooks, HarperCollins Publishers.

groups in a determined society today, fifty, and three hundred years ago. On the other hand, stereotypes apparently give us a feeling of order and security, but are inflexible and try to freeze one meaning.

When we think and communicate we are not only using categories but we are also making distinctions within them, observing generalities and discussing concrete cases. We see collective attributes and individual ways of being.¹¹ The same categories are elastic as concepts like ‘democracy’ and ‘violence’ demonstrate¹² and if categorization is a necessary element of thought and communication is also particularization. The former cannot exist without the latter.¹³

Stereotypes constitute an inadequate way of representing the Others. First, because they isolate certain sections and behaviors, some inclinations, they snatch them from their historical and cultural context, and they attribute them to all the individuals in a social group. Second, they ignore or they put a slant on certain central aspects of the identity of groups of victims of stereotyping, or of their culture and of their social life. Finally, they ‘freeze’ the representation of the Others impeding alternative ways of seeing and understanding them. In this process, the press plays a central role in contemporary western societies. They represent metonymically certain ethnic groups, demonize them, contribute to their marginalization, and ignore others. Finally, we can add that stereotypes about an ethnic group can be contradictory as illustrated by the following paragraph by Argentine writer and essayist Ernesto Sábato about Jews and anti-Semites:

Nevertheless, and violating the principle of contradiction, a basis for Aristotelian logic, the anti-Semite will say successively – and yet simultaneously – that the Jew is a banker and a Bolshevik, greedy and squandering, limited to his ghetto and with a finger in every pie. It is apparent that in these conditions Jews have no escape: whatever he says, does, or thinks will fall under the jurisdiction of anti-

¹⁰ See Billig Michael (1985). “Prejudice, categorization and particularization: from a perceptual to a rhetorical approach”. *European Journal of Social Psychology*.

¹¹ See Michael Pickering (2001). *Stereotyping. The Politics of Representation*, pp. 28-29. Palgrave: New York.

¹² What is the common element, for example, of the American, Scandinavian, and Indian democracy? Is violence only physical aggression or is it also the tremendous social differences that condemn children to sickness, hunger, and illiteracy?

*Semitism. It doesn't matter if he is generous or miserly, dirty or clean, elegant or unkempt, shy or bold, religious or atheist.*¹⁴

This underlines that the key to the stereotype as a figure of representation is not in the greater or lesser approach to the 'reality' of the image of the person or group, but rather in the justification of the aversion.

We represent the Others using language or images and they give us the opportunity to represent them in a generalized or particularized, prejudiced or tolerant, rigid or flexible way.

If we are not obligated by strict laws of cognition to choose the first category of these opposites, the question arises as to why groups more or less considered within a nation or group of nations hold to partial, rigid, metonymic representations of the Others.

IV. Ideology and symbolic constructions

Representations of the Others can be seen as ideologies. As the very concept has many meanings, it is necessary to define it in order to make it operative. It can be discerned, with certain clarity, between two forms of seeing the ideology.¹⁵ The non-evaluative conception represented by, among others, Mannheim and Clifford Geertz is on one side. It relates to a conception that defines the ideology as beliefs, ideas, or as symbolical systems, unless the content of these beliefs or ideas are necessarily negative or problematic.

Therefore, from the perspective of anthropology, Clifford Geertz has thought of ideology as cultural schemes that attempt to offer us orientation before a problematic reality. In effect, Geertz states that:

Culture patterns "religious, philosophical, aesthetic, scientific, ideological" are "programs"; they provide a template or blueprint for the organization of social

¹³ See Billig, op. cit, p. see Billig p. 86. Also, "Arguing about categories", in Billig (1996). *Arguing and thinking. A rhetorical approach to social psychology*, pp. 176-182.

¹⁴ Sábato 1991: 30-31.

and psychological processes, much as genetic systems provide such a template for the organization of organic processes."¹⁶

Another vital contribution of Clifford Geertz' concept of ideology is the pointing out of its rhetorical character. Ideologies, according to the American anthropologist, move away from the moderate language of science and they utilize figures such as the metaphor, metonymy, and hyperbole. It is not necessary to recall the metaphor of the Muslims as "invaders" in Denmark, or the metonymy of the Muslim as a religious fanatic and macho, or the hyperbolic images of them as rapists and bloodthirsty.

Those that see ideology as an illusion, deceit, hidden, distortion, and falsehood are seen as situated on the other extreme of the conception of ideology. This is an idea already contained in Marx and developed by many authors inspired by him. Here I will limit myself to presenting some studies that examine ideology from this angle.

Thus, from a semiotic perspective Ronald Barthes developed the idea of various levels of meaning.¹⁷ It is said that a sign can, in a second level, comprise itself in the meaning of a new sign derived from the first. This idea of new levels of meaning is important, because it allows understanding of mythologies of modernity and (why not?) of post modernity. Barthes' intuition can be illustrated with the example of the car or automobile that on the first level means an self-propelled vehicle used to travel, and on the second (depending on the type of car) it can mean prestige, wealth, youth, sportive air, good taste, etc. On the third level, and in certain social contexts, it can be associated with the idea of technical sophistication, comfort, speed, saving time, the ability to travel in diverse terrain, protection and comfort that permit one to become independent of rain and wind (control over nature), etc. We enter right into the *mythology of modernity*. The themes, plots, and characters of the ancient myths open the road and manage to express themselves as events and sports spectacles, in film or in literature: the good and the bad, "Us" and "Them", David versus Goliath, the just sacrificed, nature against man, etc.

¹⁵ On the different ways of conceiving ideology, see Poul Ricoeur (1999). *Ideología y Utopía*. Gedisa editorial: Barcelona. Also John B. Thompson (1990). *Ideology and Modern Culture*. Polity Press: Oxford

¹⁶ Clifford Geertz (1973) "Ideology As a Cultural System", p. 216. In (by the same author) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. BasicBooks, HarperCollins Publishers..

Concepts can also convert themselves into myths. Therefore childhood has been seen as a depository for innocence, uncorrupt, uncontaminated and good only in modern times.¹⁸ The connection of modern mythologies with ancient symbols filled with meaning help to explain the psychic inversion and the state of mind in “epic poetry” like the “Tour de France”.

Another vision of ideology is that of the semiotic and writer Umberto Eco.¹⁹ For Eco, ideology is a partial and unconnected vision of the world that is characterized by concealing – in the choice of words and in argumentation – alternative meanings and relationships, because of not taking into account the complexity and character, at times contradictory, in semantic fields. Eco offers the example of the maximum adjective in relation to a mechanical apparatus and the calculations of /pressure/ /heating/ and /production/. While a maximum has positive connotations in the calculations of 2 and 3, it has a negative connotation in 1 = danger. An ideological reasoning in which heating and production are the supreme values and equated with general happiness conceals the ultimate meaning and with it the incompatibility between these values and general security.

We can denominate these approaches to ideology as criticisms. Thompson’s approximation is within the same perspective, but with a clearly different nuance that makes situations in which ideology is united with power stand out, limiting the use of the concept and ideas and beliefs that establish and sustain dominance. Dominance exists when we find ourselves faced with a systematic asymmetry of groups and individuals in relationship to power:

“When particular agents are endowed with power in a durable way which excludes, and to some significant degree remains inaccessible to, other agents or groups of agents, irrespective of the basis upon which such exclusion is carried out”²⁰

¹⁷ Barthes Roland, 1999. *Mitologías*. Siglo Veintiuno: Madrid (First edition in Spanish, 1980). By the same author (1971) *Elementos de semiología*. Comunicación : Madrid . See also the Introduction by Paul Cobley (1996) a *The Communication Theory Reader*. Routledge, London and New York, and M.,Gottdiener (1995) *Postmodern Semiotics. Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life*. Basil Blackwell: Oxford.

¹⁸ See Marcel Danesi and Poul Perron (1999). *Analyzing Cultures. An Introduction and Handbook*, p. 259. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, Indiana.

It is important to point out that dominance does not limit itself – as Marxist tradition tends to – to the relationships between classes. It goes much further, and includes, in the world in which we live, the relationship between the sexes, between ethnic majorities and minorities, between nations, etc.

Now, ideology operates in five different ways to those different strategies tied to symbolic construction.

These ways and strategies with certain adjustments and interpretations seem to me to be adequate to analyze the question of the representation of the Others. Before discussing them, I would like to point out two important aspects of ideology in the concepts of Thompson. One of these is the special situation of ideologies in modern and secularized society as a substitute species from myths and religion that used to give sense to social organization and to life in pre-industrialized societies.²¹ The other is the importance of the press in the diffusion of these ideologies. As a result of the impact of visions, ideas, stories, and images in societies with newspapers, radio, television, and film, it is immense and, in fact, for the questions at hand, it is obvious that the representation that is made in other ethnic groups in the press, television, and film, are of decisive importance.

Whatever domination, as indicated by Max Weber, needs a *legitimization* in order to be stable; in other words, ideas and images that might make the domination acceptable and valid. A legitimizing ideology can be validated by symbolic construction of strategies such as: a) *rationalization*, or reasonings that justify determined social relations and institutions and that present them as worthy of support; b) *universalization*, that is, the interests of an institution, group, or nation are presented as the best and most advantageous for all other individuals, nations, etc.; c) *narrativization*, includes the stories, legends, and myths associated with a timeless past and ideal that confers unity and cohesion to a nation or ethnic group despite the social, economic, situational differences, etc.

¹⁹ In: Eco Umberto (1977) *Tratado de semiótica general*. Barcelona, Lumen.

²⁰ See John B. Thompson (1990) *Ideology and Modern Culture. Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*, p. 59. Polity Press: Oxford.

Another way of working with ideology that makes it possible to establish and maintain dominant relationships is through dissimulation, which operates through denial and the hiding of these relationships. The strategies of symbolic construction tied to this method are: a) *displacement*, when a term that is typically used to refer to a person or object is employed to refer to another moving toward positive or negative connotations from one to the other: “the allies” to refer to the United States and England in the war against Iraq; b) *euphemism*, the selective representation of relationships of power with the goal of obtaining a positive evaluation such as when torture, execution and exile of political opponents is termed the “restoration of law and order” or concentration camps, “rehabilitation centers”; c) *tropes* (metonymy, metaphor) metonymy in which the veil represents all women who come from nations where the religion is Islam or the metaphor is that of immigration such as “the Muslim invasion”.

A third mode of operation is the *unification* that attempts to elide the differences of economic or social power or of another type building a symbolic unity, for example, speaking a determined language or being a member of a national Church.

A fourth mode is the *fragmentation* that operates emphasizing the differences between groups and people and obviating the similarities. The supposed differences that stand out can refer to attitudes, beliefs, or appearance. In extreme cases, one can arrive at the elimination of the different Others: “the eradication of the Marxist cancer”.²²

A fifth mode is the reification, which, following Thompson, allows that:

*“Relations of domination may be established and sustained by representing a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, outside the time. Processes are portrayed as things or as events of a quasi-natural kind, in such a way that their social and historical character is eclipsed.”*²³

²¹ Idea already mentioned by other authors such as Goddenier, and Barthes in works previously mentioned.

Reification deals with strategies by means of *naturalization*, certain situations that are the product of historical, social, and cultural factors are presented as the result of natural characteristics. Dominance over women, for example, has been supported by the idea that the psychological and biological characteristics of women have made them suitable only for certain professions and jobs and exclude them from others.

Another strategy is *eternalization*. Relationships of power in certain societies cause the receptors to see their superior identity confirmed through messages that stand out as in “things have always been this way”. This is the case of tea advertisements that show pride and the magnificence of the Empire. Or tourist brochures that offer an exotic “Other” as a perpetual theater backdrop in which the lives of the white tourists can be represented.²⁴

V. Anglo-Saxonism and the American Representation of Mexicans

If we examine the strategies of symbolic construction – that may or may not be ideological – we can observe that the form in which we represent the Others has been and is utilized to legitimize the oppression and approval of the resources of certain groups to the detriment of others. Thus, the legitimization of the expansion of the United States by means of the strategies of *rationalization* and *universalization* plants its roots in Biblical motives about a man’s (white and Protestant) right to subjugate and exploit nature.²⁵ The English Puritans that conquered and colonized North America understood themselves to be like the personification of civilization and saw nature that was not cultivated with suspicion and contempt. They associated the chaos and disarray that they were observing in nature as the undoing by and the dwelling of the devil. The conquest and dominance over nature was a metaphor of the internal conquest of their passions and desires.

²² This is how the persecution and murder of political opponents of the dictatorship of General Pinochet was justified. See Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela (1991). *Chile a Nation of Enemies. Chile Under Pinochet*, p. 47. W. W. Norton & Company: New York, London.

²³ Thompson op.cit., p. 65.

The Illustration with its emphasis on material progress and the rationale that demands the control of nature was later united with the religious legitimization of this conquest and dominance, and had Darwinist motives. The domestication of nature was seen as a “heroic war”.

The mission of the white man was to better and correct nature, eradicate evil, and promote good among living beings. The racial motive became present and a series of justified oppositions of the Puritan colonial mission were established:

<i>Civilization</i>	<i>Nature</i>
Progress	Primitivism
Christianity	Paganism
Whites (Protestants)	Redskins and blacks
Light	Shadow
Good	Evil

In the same way that the Americans understood themselves as a personification of civilization, they saw the indigenous as the personification of uncultivated nature. Virtue and its fruits – private property and economic greatness – depended on the continual and systematic exploitation of nature. Indigenous Americans had been (in the vision of the Puritan colonizers) incapable of exploiting natural resources. Doing it and imposing civilization were a divine mandate that legitimized the appropriation of indigenous property.

The American expansion to the west and south was justified by the belief in the superiority of their civilization and the right to subdue nature and groups seen as slaves by nature: women, Indians, blacks, Latin Americans. Many of

²⁴ See Robert Ferguson (1998). *Representing 'Race'. Ideology, identity and the media*, p. 53. Arnold: London.

²⁵ These affirmations of the character of the English colonists in America and about the stereotypes and prejudices of Americans regarding Indians, Afro-Americans, Mexicans and Hispanic Americans in general are based on the book by the North American historian Fredrick B. Pike (1992). *The United States and Latin America. Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature*. University of Texas Press: Austin. Pike's book is based on hundreds of primary and secondary sources.

the stereotypes and mythologies about the Indians and blacks were later attributed to the inhabitants of the other America, largely populated by people of color considered effeminate for being closer to nature, as were women being people of feelings rather than reason, adhering to a religion with a feminine mysticism as opposed to rational and intellectual proofs, lacking self-control, having a tendency to submission, etc.

A clear example of how the representations of the other can be tied to ideologies and be symbolic constructions by means of which ideology operates is the elaboration of the *Anglo-Saxonizing* of the United States in the 1830s and 1840s.²⁶ This ideology came from the encounters and conflicts of Americans and Mexicans in the American southwest, around the rebellion of Texas and in relation to the Mexican-American War. From the first encounters and conflicts it became clear that American and Mexican interests were not the same and that the imposition of American interests would carry with it the suffering of the Mexicans. Americans were also anxiously looking for explicative models of their apparent success and of the similar failure of the Spanish-speaking American. The explanation of the failure and the legitimization of the suffering inflicted on the Mexicans is achieved through the creation of a series of beliefs about their racial inferiority and about a mythology about the virtues of the Anglo-Saxon 'race'. It was much easier to attribute the suffering and the plundering of the Mexicans to their racial inferiority than to accept that it could be the result of the merciless search of power and wealth on the part of the Americans.

In these descriptions of Mexicans formed by Americans in the above-mentioned contexts, one of the factors that stands out the most as representative of inferiority is the *Mestizo* character of the Mexican 'race', in which one finds, according to American commentators, all the 'poisonous' combinations possible of color and blood. Another motive of criticism was of the heterogeneous character of the Mexicans that 'speak more than twenty languages'.²⁷

Mexicans are sketched as people that consequently try to do things with the least physical and mental effort possible, as 'uncivilized', that are scarcely

²⁶ The presentation of this ideology and its relationship with Mexicans are based on the work of Reginald Horsman (1981). *Race and Manifest Destiny. The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England.

above the masses of barbarians that surround them. They are associated with adjectives such as the following: lazy, dirty, ignorant, dishonest, and cruel. In contrast, for example, we see the human behavior that went to war with the Texans in the cruel and uncivilized manner used to fight against the Mexicans.²⁸

The dehumanization of the Mexicans made the plundering and abuse of those who were subjugated by the Americans acceptable. Snatching land from them was not a crime, but rather a fulfillment of the divine mandate to make it fruitful.²⁹ The destiny of the Americans was to populate the continent with industrious Anglo-Saxons, cultivate it, and expand the civilization. Facing the Anglo-Saxon push, the other races that populated the continent vanished (a euphemism for extermination) as the North American Indians had. A *narrativization* of the virtues of the Anglo-Saxon race; chivalrous, lovers of liberty, and expansionist, arose. The understanding of this ideology should also incorporate a context in which economic depression and the increase of German and Irish immigration created insecurity that they tried to alleviate through a racial mythologization and the feelings of solidarity that this attempted to create.

The expansion of England and the United States was seen as a realization of the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race to take liberty and commerce to the most remote regions of the planet for the good (*universalization*) of the whole world. Therefore, when England attacked China during the opium war, the aggression was celebrated in the New York Herald with the following lines:

*“Another movement of the Anglo-Saxon spirit in the remotest east, against the barriers of semi-barbarians and a half-civilized race, who have been stationary for twenty centuries or more.”*³⁰

²⁷ The expressions of Mississippi senator Robert J. Walker, who became leader of the Democratic Party in the mid-1840s, see *Race and Manifest Destiny*, pp. 215-216.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 213

²⁹ México lost half of its territory to the benefit of the United States. See Tulio Halperin Donghi (1977). *Historia Contemporánea de América Latina*, p. 180. Alianza Editorial : Madrid.

VI. The ambiguous representation: rejection and fascination

To this point I have outlined the more negative representations of the Others. Nevertheless, we can confirm in the travel writing, literature, paintings, film, musical and dance styles, movements of friends of the Indians, etc. that the exotic and primitive Others have exercised and continue to exercise a fascination over Europeans and Americans. The fascination for the non-Western Other has a long history and has been termed *exoticism*. Apparently, in this figure of representation it is a matter of images and of a positive manner of speaking, as the Others are trustees of virtues and qualities that we lack. However, this is not necessarily the case. For example, in the 'exotic' representation the Other is utilized as allegory to criticize aspects of the society that the subject it represents wants to transform. In this manner, American Indians or other primitive peoples were used as an illustration of the opposite of the deficiencies and vices of Western society that they wanted to criticize; among the (good) savages there was no private property (seen much before Marx as a principal cause of the evils of European society), social hierarchies and subordination, but there was sexual liberty.³¹

In these and other ways of representing the Other, there was not interest in getting to know him up close, to find out what he thinks about, feels, or longs for. This same attitude is that which is expressed in travel and experience narratives and in which the subject is a white European or American man that tells of his relationship with exotic women and countries. The exotic woman is doubly Other, exterior and strange because of her sex and furthermore (from the perspective of the white, Western male), for her race. The motives behind the desire of a relationship with the exotic woman are varied, but one of them in the past and in the present has been that of giving flavor and color to a life considered to be boring and insipid in Western societies. Thus, the French naval officer Pierre Loti, who published books in the 1870s that were half fiction and half travel narratives, wrote: "I have come to the conclusion that I have right to do as I please, and that this insipid banquet of life requires all the spice that one can lend it".³² And more recently, Bell Hooks affirmed:

³⁰ *Race and Manifest Destiny* p. 227.

“The commodification of otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.”³³

In Loti’s works the capacity of giving oneself over to actual sexual pleasure is attributed to the black woman, a product of a natural sensuality associated with a closeness to animals. In general, in order to represent people of other races (black, and yellow in the vocabulary of the time period) animallike images recur, thus the Japanese³⁴ are compared to monkeys.

Loti not only wrote exotic narratives. He was also interested in the opposite case, that is, that of the European citizen of a European colonial power who sees himself obligated to remain in the colony when he longs to return to his country. So the figures are inverted from exoticism (the Others and the Other are the best) to nationalism (those which are ours and that which is ours is the best) and of the xenophilia that becomes xenophobia. Apparently a paradox, but as Todorov writes the common theme in both cases is that the Others are seen and treated as objects, and we could also add the nature and culture of their nations. The only subject is the white man. There is only interest in what he feels, experiences, and thinks; the Others are simply objects and statistics.

We must underline the representations that Loti presents of Turks, Senegalese, Tahitians, and Japanese. They were tied to a situation of dominance, that of French colonialism.

One of the current forms of expression of the fascination for the primitive and/or exotic³⁵ Others is expressed as the *nostalgia* for their ways of life, cultures, and traditions that the expansion of Western economy has destroyed. Think of films about the redskins made by Americans, such as *Dances with Wolves*.

³¹ TODOROV Tzvetan *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, p. 208

³² Ibid., p. 352

³³ Bell Hooks (1992). *Black Looks. Race and Representation*. South End Press: Boston, MA, p.21.

For some members of the white, Western, hegemonic culture the body of the Other of color would be, still, the trustee of the *primitive spirit*.

The current desire for the Other of color has, then, also to do with the projection onto him/her of plentitude, exuberance, corporeity of that which is lacking and as in ancient religious ceremonies, the Other was devoured to take possession of his virtues and of his spirit. Today one wants to sexually possess the Other not only for the pleasure of the act but also because of the belief that this will bring with it a transformation.³⁶

It is indubitable that the nostalgia for the desire for the different Other is commercialized, as seen with cigarettes such as *Ducados* with the round-bodied, soft, sensual, young black women as a metaphor for the cigarette. Or how the nostalgia of romanticism, the erotic longing and the corporal plasticity have been used to promote the group *Buena Vista Social Club*.³⁷ Commercialization is justly criticized, because it implies utilization, dehistoricization, and depoliticization and contributes to maintain, unquestioned, racial hegemony and white, Western culture. For example, all of the production of cultural objects related to the phenomenon of *Buena Vista Social Club* (compact discs, video, DVD, photo book) have brought the flavor of Cuban music to the European public, but without references to social and political contexts: that of the musicians in their youth and that of Cuban music today. The incorporation of these contexts carries with it a critical reflection that would lose in the tasting of the cultural mouthful.

VII. Conclusions

Stereotypes and prejudice as forms of representation of the Others are not as simple and innocent as the theories in vogue in the field of intercultural communication might suggest. The research of academics like Michael Billig and

³⁴ In Loti's books we see a form of representing the Japanese that has lasted: "At the moment of departure, I can only find within myself a smile of careless mockery for the swarming crowd of this Liliputian curtsying people, "laborious, industrious, greedy of gain, tainted with a constitutional affectation, hereditary insignificance, and incurable monkeyishness." Cited by Todorov in *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought* pp. 313.

³⁵ This can also take the form of super-modern exoticism: the fascination that today's Japan exercises or the United States considered to be more advanced technologically than Western Europeans.

Michael Pickering show the need to distinguish between categories (necessary to understand and order the world) and stereotypes as figures of representation that are inadequate because of their inflexibility, their tendency to freeze a meaning, dehistoricization, and the hiding of important traits of the stereotyped groups, etc.

One of the causes of the lasting nature of stereotypes and prejudice in spite of better information and of the apparent better education of people is that they are useful in the construction of a positive self-image in the groups that look at the Others with disdain, through stereotypes and prejudice.

Another factor that is, perhaps, even more important, is the negative representation of the Others which has been and remains tied to ideologies. As a part of these representations of the Others, they can be seen as strategies of symbolic construction that share the rhetoric style of ideologies and that, upon representing the Others, utilize figures such as metonymy, metaphor, hyperbole, euphemism, displacement, etc. Ideologies legitimize the dominance of one group over another, and lead to discrimination, inequality, and, horror in these post-modern times, exploitation. Innumerable cases in the relationships between men and women, ethnic groups and even between nations can illustrate this affirmation of the role of these ideologies. In this article, I have tried to demonstrate how ideology and Anglo-Saxonism and the negative representations of Mexicans tied to this ideology justified and made acceptable the appropriation of half of the Mexican territory by the United States and the suffering of Mexicans derived from this act of expansion. The representations of Mexicans and, in fact, of Latin Americans in general (the authors studied maintain that Americans tend to see Latin Americans based on the image that they have of Mexicans) that come forth in this time period have lasted. This is not difficult

³⁶ Bell Hooks tells that while teaching at Yale, the white students talked of “their plans to fuck as many girls from other racial/ethnic groups as they could ‘catch before graduation’”. In: *Black Looks. Race and Representation*, p. 23

³⁷ An article by Fernando Valerio-Holguín exists about this. *Buena Vista Social Club: Canibalismo cultural y nostalgia imperialista*”. Retos para un nuevo milenio: Lengua, cultura y sociedad. Actas del Coloquio Internacional de la Asociación Europea de Profesores de Español, Ed. Sara Zas. Fort Collins, Colorado: Colorado State University. 2000. 79-86. The article can be downloaded from the internet: <http://lamar.colostate.edu/~fvalerio/buena-vista.htm>

to confirm in the innumerable films in which American film has represented Latin Americans: ignorant, dirty, corrupt, violent, superstitious, inefficient, cruel, etc. We will have to examine how these representations have been used to sanction the American interventions as the object of establishing regimes that insure the economic and geopolitical dominance of the United States in the region.

On the other extreme we find representations of the Others that are, apparently, markedly positive. In these, the culture or the body of the Others would be in harmony with nature. In this last case the Others have been or are instrumentalized with a utopian end: between them there is no private property, nor are there social hierarchies or sexual restrictions or, in more recent times, the Others are represented as the paradigm of the harmony with nature. Nevertheless, how these exotic Others live, think, feel, desire, their institutions and 'real' history are not of great importance.

The need to give color and flavor to life in programmed, disillusioned societies where instrumental knowledge is appropriated from the public and private spheres, carried a desire for a more harmonious contact with the body and nature, a longing for romanticism, eroticism or magic that is projected in the exotic Others that are imagined as trustees of a great need to enjoy, dance, rhythm, passion, feelings, etc. The body and culture of the exotic Others are utilized to satisfy these deeply-felt feelings. They are commercialized, dehistoricized, depoliticized, and converted into objects. The latter is what gives meaning to the apparent contradiction of negative and positive representations. When the Others have been reduced to objects it is secondary if they are denigrated or exalted; the important thing is that they are stripped of their condition as integral human beings. The unique feelings, emotions, thoughts, and life experiences that count are those of the ones that have the power to make their representations the dominant ones.

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